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2013-04

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Center for Homeland Defense and Security

Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California

<http://hdl.handle.net/10945/51095>



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Kluckhuhn Takes Emergency Liaison Role with Coast Guard

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Center for Homeland Defense and Security alumnus Chris Kluckhuhn has been named to a Coast Guard emergency preparedness job that will focus on working with other federal, state, local and territorial partners in disaster response.

Kluckhuhn was named an Emergency Preparedness Liaison Officer (EPLO) with the agency he served for more than 12 years on active duty. Beginning this summer he will serve as a Coast Guard Reserve Officer while still operating his business, Avwatch, which he founded in 2008 upon leaving active duty.

"I will still be filling a Reserve capacity but there is a high likelihood of spending much more time back in uniform dealing with hurricanes and other natural disasters that will affect my area of responsibility," he said.

Kluckhuhn has been assigned to FEMA Region II encompassing New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The job's primary goal is to work with governmental partners during catastrophic events. Prior to establishing the EPLO program, the Coast Guard placed liaisons with federal agencies such as the White House, FEMA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, but not with regional, state and other local partners.

The pressing priorities are critical infrastructure protection, technology, collaboration among overlapping sectors and jurisdictions, response, prevention, and public health, he said. One of his first actions will be to reach out to the expansive CHDS alumni network in the region to bolster partnerships and preparedness.

"This new position will require knowledge and expertise across all homeland security issues," Kluckhuhn observed.

That experience came from not only the Coast Guard and CHDS academics, but also with Avwatch. The company provides real-time situational awareness during disaster response through its six-aircraft fleet and a suite of aerial sensor systems that provide streaming video to emergency responders on the ground. Avwatch has been hired to work major events such as the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and Hurricane Irene.

"My business, Avwatch, has continued to grow and our team is able to function well without me, which has provided me the opportunity to take on more responsibility in the Coast Guard," Kluckhuhn said.

Kluckhuhn's business and Coast Guard experience has shown him the importance of private sector partners in disaster preparedness and response. He pointed to a recent case following Superstorm Sandy in which a private sector company that was proactive in reaching out to the Coast Guard and was able to bring the agency Internet connectivity which in turned expedited the reopening of the Port of New York/New Jersey.

"Personally, I think the single biggest thing needed to improve those partnerships is building effective relationships with the private sector prior to a disaster," he observed. "The private sector has most of the resources and capabilities and wants to be able to help and contribute after a disaster. Having those discussions with as many partners as possible well in advance will significantly help future responses."

His CHDS education complemented his years of experience and cultivated his leadership skills.



"I knew CHDS was the very best way to build upon my operational expertise by interacting in intellectual discussions with other homeland security leaders from all aspects of homeland security," he said. "Gaining a broad based understanding of all facets of homeland security in the collaborative environment of CHDS has made me a better leader."

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